

GLEBE CENTER  
71-89 North Glebe Road  
Arlington  
Virginia

HABS VA-1436  
VA-1436

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### GLEBE CENTER

HABS No. VA-1436

Location: 71-89 North Glebe Road, in central Arlington near the Buckingham apartment complex and the neighborhood known as Ashton Heights, in Arlington County, Virginia.

The coordinates for the Glebe Center are 38.872194N, 77.102047W; these were obtained using Google Earth in August 2010 and, it is assumed, NAD 1983. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Description: The Glebe Center is a low-scale commercial building with a parking forecourt that faces southwest towards North Glebe Road. It is one-story in height and L-shaped in plan. It is made of cinder-block faced in a veneer of bricks laid in six-course American bond and dressed with cast-stone decorative elements. The roof is flat behind a parapet. The street-façade is punctuated by large storefront windows, and ornamented with geometric floral and chevron motifs in the Art Deco style. There is also a central, square tower with a glass-block clerestory and pyramidal metal roof. Inside, the stores have all been retrofitted and built-out for tenant needs and so little original fabric survives; a notable exception is the stamped metal ceiling found in one unit.

History: During the 1930s a steady influx of people moved to Washington, D.C., and environs as part of the burgeoning federal government, working in New Deal programs and later in defense related industries in preparation for war. Arlington County was no exception. In this decade some 40 percent of Arlingtonians would be employed in public service; many were commuters. As a result, residential and commercial construction projects abounded, especially in the suburbs and included a myriad of apartment complexes and what would become the neighborhood shopping center. The shopping center could be an independent venture, located near a residential community, or be part of the planned development. Such duality of purpose was encouraged by the Federal Housing Administration, the agency insuring many of the apartment buildings and complexes. Unlike a downtown Main Street, the neighborhood shopping centers clustered between seven to twenty tenants in one structure and offered off-street parking.<sup>1</sup>

Automobile culture defined the design for the shopping centers, assuring the presence of a parking forecourt that occupied a significant portion of the lot with

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<sup>1</sup> See Richard Longstreth, "The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, D.C., 1930-41," *Journal of the Society for Architectural Historians* 51 (March 1992): 5-34; Laura Trieschmann and Carrie Albee, "Glebe Center," Nomination July 2003, National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, who cite Carl B. Rose, Jr., *Arlington County Virginia: A History* (Baltimore: Port City Press, Inc., 1976), 247-48.

one or more rows of diagonal spaces. The low-scale shopping centers were generally one story in height. The individual retail stores were contiguous to one another, each fronting on the parking lot. All of the stores had an entrance accessed directly from the lot.<sup>2</sup>

Following Arthur B. Heaton's (1930) *Park and Shop* on Connecticut Avenue were another twenty-five or so neighborhood shopping centers erected throughout the D.C. suburbs up until the United States' entry into the Second World War in 1941. The innovative *Park and Shop* served as the model for these shopping centers, both in D.C. and throughout the country as a whole, as the type emerged during the 1930s. At least eleven neighborhood shopping centers of this genre were constructed in Arlington County before the war. In fact, by 1941, neighborhood shopping centers appeared on almost every major thoroughfare in the county. There were four on North Glebe Road, including the Glebe Center, plus three on Columbia Pike and two on Wilson Boulevard.<sup>3</sup>

Since its construction in 1940, the Glebe Center has served the community, offering convenient retail and for many years, a grocery store, to those who lived nearby. By 1960, however, the small scale of the Glebe Center and its adjacent parking lot was viewed less favorably than the new, larger mall at Ballston Common by planning officials. Nonetheless, the center survived. Today, it is considered to be representative of the *Park and Shop* model and it continues to be a viable commercial enclave.<sup>4</sup>

Sources: Laura Trieschmann and Carrie Albee, Nomination July 2003, National Register for Historic Places, National Park Service.

Site visit, July-August 2010.

Historian: Virginia B. Price, 2010.

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<sup>2</sup> Longstreth, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Sara Amy Leach, "Mihran Mesrobian's Suburban Virginia Garden Apartments and Shopping Centers," Paper presented at Beyond the Mall, Washington, D.C., December 1994; Trieschmann and Albee, sec. 8, 6-8; Longstreth, 17, 33 (appendix).

<sup>4</sup> Trieschmann and Albee, sec. 8, 10-11.

Figure 1. Perspective view looking across the parking lot to the Glebe Center; view from the southwest. (Photograph by author, 2010).



Figure 2. Closer view to show storefront (Photograph by author, 2010).

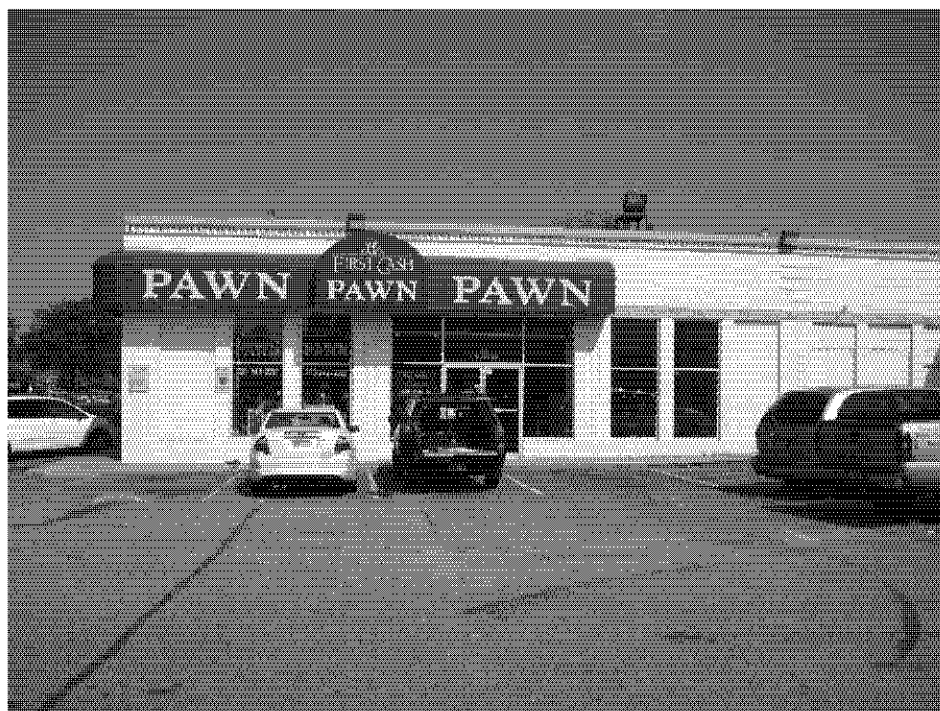


Figure 3. Detail view (Photograph by author, 2010).

